

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051
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<https://oversight.house.gov>

July 28, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street Northwest
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

Republicans on the House Oversight and Reform Committee are writing to request information about the delay in passport services offered by the State Department. Travel and tourism are essential parts of the U.S. economy and responsible for more than 10 percent of global GDP as well as 320 million jobs. The airline industry was among the hardest hit during the pandemic, and reigniting the travel industry is key to the economic recovery in the U.S. Many Americans are excited to travel internationally after more than a year of travel restrictions.¹

Despite the relaxed COVID-19 travel restrictions, U.S. citizens are encountering protracted delays when applying for or renewing their passports.² The State Department's website currently says that routine passport service can take up to 18 weeks (including mailing time).³ Routine passport service took up to 12 weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic began.⁴ Expedited passport processing is also delayed—now taking up to 12 weeks instead of four to six weeks.⁵

¹ Adam Behsudi, *Wish you were here*, INTERNAT'L MONETARY FUND (Winter 2020), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2020/12/impact-of-the-pandemic-on-tourism-behsudi.htm>

² Larry Bleiberg, *Don't Wait to Renew Your Passport*, AARP (Jun. 9, 2021), <https://www.aarp.org/travel/travel-tips/international/info-2021/passport-renewal-delays.html>.

³ *Passport Operations in response to COVID-19*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/passport-covid-19.html> (last visited Jul. 23, 2021).

⁴ Carol Morello, *U.S. passport processing resumes as centers first tackle a coronavirus backlog*, THE WASH. POST (Jun. 12, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-passport-processing-resumes-as-centers-first-tackle-a-coronavirus-backlog/2020/06/12/34b2caf8-acc6-11ea-868b-93d63cd833b2_story.html; *Passport Operations in response to COVID-19*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE,

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/ea/passport-covid-19.html> (last visited Jul. 23, 2021).

⁵ *Id.*

It was reported last June that about half of the State Department's passport workers had returned to their offices.⁶ More than a year later the State Department has been unable to catch up with the demand and it appears the backlog is continuing to grow.⁷ Many Americans are being forced to cancel travel plans to see family and friends because despite trying to plan ahead, they are unable to renew or obtain a passport.⁸

In order to help the Committee better understand the scope and causes of the passport backlog, please provide the following documents and information no later than August 11, 2021:

1. A detailed explanation of the process the State Department goes through once the agency receives a passport application.
2. The number of applications and renewals currently pending and contributing to this backlog.
3. The average number of passport and renewal applications received each day.
4. The number of passport workers the State Department currently employs, and the percentage of passport workers currently in the office.
5. The plans and procedures which outline when all passport workers will be required to be back into the office.
6. Whether the State Department plans on hiring more staff to help work through the backlog?

In addition, please make arrangements to schedule a briefing no later than August 4, 2021 on the State Department's plan to reduce the backlog and begin issuing passports in a timely fashion. To schedule the briefing or ask any follow-up or related questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Reform Republican staff at (202) 225-5074.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for cooperating with this inquiry.

⁶ Carol Morello, *U.S. passport processing resumes as centers first tackle a coronavirus backlog*, THE WASH. POST (Jun. 12, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/us-passport-processing-resumes-as-centers-first-tackle-a-coronavirus-backlog/2020/06/12/34b2caf8-acc6-11ea-868b-93d63cd833b2_story.html

⁷ Larry Bleiberg, *Don't Wait to Renew Your Passport*, AARP (Jun. 9, 2021), <https://www.aarp.org/travel/travel-tips/international/info-2021/passport-renewal-delays.html>.

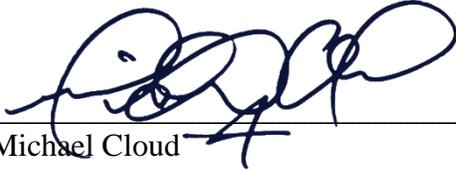
⁸ Amy Davis, *Major passport delays cause travel troubles*, KPRC 2 HOUSTON, (July 5, 2021), <https://www.click2houston.com/news/local/2021/07/05/major-passport-delays-cause-travel-troubles/>

Hon. Antony Blinken

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Sincerely,



Michael Cloud
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic and
Consumer Policy



Fred Keller
Member of Congress



Scott Franklin
Member of Congress



Andrew Clyde
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Raja Krishnamoorthi, Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic and Consumer Policy